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PARAMILITARY FORCES IN GREECE,  
1946-1949

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26 February 1971

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PARAMILITARY FORCES IN GREECE, 1946-1949

AN IAS-INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT REPORT

by

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26 February 1971

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## ABSTRACT

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<sup>5.1.1</sup>  
The purpose of this paper was to examine, through a literature search, the role and value of paramilitary forces in Greece during the civil war between 1946 and 1949. The organization, equipment, training, and techniques of both the insurgent and Greek government paramilitary forces are described and analyzed. The true potential role of the government forces in subduing such an insurgency was masked by the conditions prevailing in Greece in 1946. There were no effective government forces in being at the conclusion of World War II. As a result, the insurgency was countered initially by makeshift units until the Army, Gendarmerie and other forces could be revitalized. It is concluded that the paramilitary forces did play an important part in the government victory, but that the Army was forced to carry the major share of the burden because the Gendarmerie could not be revitalized quickly enough.

## PREFACE

This study project was conducted as part of the US Army Combat Development Command Institute for Advanced Studies program. The purpose was to contribute information on the operation of paramilitary forces in one country toward a broader study of low intensity conflict in a number countries.

Information on the paramilitary forces of the insurgents as well as those of Greek government was developed and analyzed. However, conclusions as to the role and contribution of such forces in subduing an insurgency were limited to the government organizations.

Members of the USAWC Library staff were most helpful in locating related reference material not available at Carlisle Barracks. Their initiative and friendly enthusiasm were greatly appreciated.

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND

Modern Greece has existed as a state only since independence from Turkey was won in 1829.<sup>1</sup> She is small, mountainous, economically underdeveloped and agriculturally deficient. Whether in spite of, or as a result of, these limitations, the Greek people have always been fiercely independent extroverts with a keen interest in politics. A multiplicity of political parties, based on personality as much as substantive issues, has led to frequent changes of government through the years.

### ORIGIN OF THE 1946-49 CONFLICT

The story of the insurgent war in Greece following World War II began with the formation of the Greek Communist Party shortly after World War I. The first hesitant step toward such a party was taken unknowingly at a meeting of Greek Socialists in Athens in 1918.<sup>2</sup> Leninist Communism was not a topic of this conference, although it was conducted in the atmosphere of the recent successful revolution in Russia. The conference resulted in the establishment of a Greek Socialist Party (SEK). In 1919

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<sup>1</sup>L.S. Stavrianos, Greece: American Dilemma and Opportunity (1952), p 18.

<sup>2</sup>D. George Kousoulas, Revolution and Defeat (1965), p 1.

the National Council (which handled SEK affairs between annual Congresses) was divided on the question of joining the recently established Third International (Comintern). Following the Second SEK Congress in April 1920, the SEK was accepted as a member of the Comintern. The Comintern decision was published in an announcement that the "Greek Communist Party" had been accepted as a member of the Comintern. Shortly after, the Central Committee began to use the title of Communist Party of Greece (KKE).<sup>3</sup>

#### Pre-World War II Communist and Government Activities

Although it is correct to state that the Greek Communist Party was a member of the Comintern from the early 1920's, it is not correct to assume that the KKE was an effective organization. It was wracked by dissension internally, and generally ignored externally, until about 1931. Membership in the party during those early years never exceeded 2,500.<sup>4</sup> Many of the slogans and statements of the Comintern fell on deaf Greek ears. The keynote of Leninist Communism is discipline and obedience to the Party above all.

They (the communists) are required to be everything a Greek is not. A Greek is patriotic, religious, emotional, loyal to his friends, hotblooded but quick to forget

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p 5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p 40.

a quarrel; he is loaded with philo'time, for which 'self-respect' is a feeble translation; however poor, he has a strong sense of private property; and he is passionately devoted to democracy.<sup>5</sup>

Through the decade of the twenties the KKE became increasingly militant and ever more closely tied to the Comintern and the communist dialectic. One unfortunate (for the KKE) legacy of the Comintern line was the requirement for the KKE to support the doctrine of autonomy or independence for Macedonia and Thrace, under the assumption that they were populated by oppressed minorities. The majority of the inhabitants of these areas were Greek and the idea of losing these territories to a "Bulgarian Federation" was abhorrent to almost every Greek - including most members of the KKE. The Macedonian "problem" was to haunt the KKE through the years. As will be seen, it had a major impact during the 1946-49 conflict.

In 1931, as a result of the continuing crises of leadership in the KKE, Nikolaos Zachariades was appointed by the Comintern to head the KKE. Zachariades was a Greek, trained in Russia, who had become a staunch Stalinist well versed in Marxism and conspiracy.<sup>6</sup> His mission was to insure the KKE worked toward the goals of the Comintern rather than bogging down in more

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<sup>5</sup> C. M. Woodhouse, "Introduction" to Revolution and Defeat, by D. G. Kousoulas, p vi.

<sup>6</sup> W. C. Chamberlain and J. D. Iams, Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Greek Communist Party, Terna Paper (Foreign Service Institute, 2 June 1963), p iii.



limited local objectives. Zachariades pushed forward with both the legal "above ground" organization as well as the illegal underground. Discipline was strengthened, and leaders in tune with the Stalinist line were installed in the hierarchy.

Zachariades' efforts were rewarded by an increase in party membership, greater sympathy from non-members, and crowned by the election of fifteen communist deputies in the 1936 national elections.<sup>7</sup> These fifteen were the balance of power in the Chamber for a time. The KKE soon fell on hard times, however, when the Greek form of government was radically altered.

A brief review of Greek history in the period 1918-1935 is depressing. Political instability (accompanied by frequent changes of government) and economic depression (with its major impact on the labor and agricultural classes) summarize the entire period. Government reaction to communism ranged from indifference to hostility. With some infrequent exceptions the KKE had little impact in Greece before 1931. After 1931 Zachariades did succeed in moving the party forward and increasing its power until Metaxas took over the government in 1936.

Following the 1936 elections the KKE held fifteen seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Since the Royalists held 143 seats and their bitter rivals the Venizelists 141, this left the balance of power in the hands of the KKE. Both major parties courted the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p 73.

KKE for support. An agreement was reached between the Venizelist leader and the KKE which would enable the Venizelists to form a government with KKE support. In return the Venizelists agreed to pass several social reform measures which the KKE favored. However, the agreement was soon abrogated and the two major parties proceed to recommend to the King that a non-political government be formed. The king concurred and appointed F. Demertzis as Premier and Ioannis Metaxas as Vice Premier. A month later Demertzis died and Metaxas was appointed Premier. An army general who had been an advisor to the King in World War I, Metaxas made no secret of his abhorrence of the political maneuverings which kept the Greek government in turmoil.

The summer of 1935 following his appointment as Premier was filled with attempt to establish a viable government, while the KKE promoted strikes and stirred up the maximum possible unrest. Finally the Parliament was dismissed and, on 4 August, Metaxas assumed dictatorial power in the face of a KKE threat of a general strike to begin the next day.

Metaxas' assumption of power was the beginning of the end for the KKE as an important force in Greece. Moving swiftly on the assumption that a communist revolution was near he outlawed the KKE and began arresting its leaders.<sup>9</sup> Exile of its leaders, infiltration by government agents and continuing police pressure

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<sup>8</sup> Kousoulas, pp 111-112.

<sup>9</sup> Chamberlain and Ians, p 80.

all combined to reduce the effectiveness of the KKE nearly to zero by 1940. World War II and the death of Metaxas were to give the communists another opportunity, however.

#### World War II Communist and Non-communist

##### Resistance Movements

The Greek Army repulsed the Italian attempts at invasion in 1940. In 1941, however, it was the German army and Metaxas was dead. This time there was no real contest and the Germans entered Athens facing the hatred of nearly every Greek citizen.

The remnants of the KKE had had a difficult time in 1940-41--not only physically but doctrinally, as well. The twists and turns of Soviet diplomacy through the non-aggression pact with Germany to the attack on Russia by Germany made it difficult for the KKE to be sure just who was the enemy on any given day. There was a period when the war was classed as imperialist, and the party of the workers and peasants was to have no part of it. Then followed a period when the communists were supporters of Germany against the existing Greek regime. Finally, however, the dastardly attack by the Germans on Russia revealed that the Nazis had been the enemy all along.

Although Metaxas had broken the back of the KKE as an effective organization by exiling or imprisoning its leaders, and continuous police surveillance of the activities of its members, the leaders were still alive and filled with zeal to return to the fray. The German occupation gave them their opportunity. Many escaped from prison while the Germans were

taking over and some were officially released by them.<sup>10</sup> Although Zachariades was turned over to the Gestapo by the Greek Security Police and spent the war in a concentration camp, there were many to take his place in Greece. As soon as they could make their way to Athens, the regrouping of the KKE began.

Shortly after Germany moved to attack Russia, the reorganized Central Committee of the KKE met in Athens. At this meeting it was made clear that the KKE was to support the USSR in its fight against Germany. Instructions to this end were received from the Comintern in July. The Comintern told its members to avoid the use of communist titles and concentrate on establishing national liberation movements which would unite all "democratic" elements against the invaders.<sup>11</sup>

In September 1941 the Greek National Liberation Front (EAM) was established by the KKE. The fact that it was KKE sponsored and controlled was concealed. The EAM was willing to accept into membership any groups interested in national independence. The EAM goals were stated to be the liberation of Greece and establishment of a provisional government, following which elections would be held without reactionary (monarchist) influence.<sup>12</sup>

For over a year the KKE (through EAM) concentrated on developing front organizations in labor and youth groups in the cities. Armed resistance to the Germans, and guerilla activities

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<sup>10</sup>Kousoulas, p 146.

<sup>11</sup>Chamberlain and Iams, p 113

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p 115.

in the countryside, were not part of the program. Some resistance groups were being organized to fight the Germans, and some were led by the communists, but not as a result of any efforts by EAM or KKE. The EAM did organize some successful strikes in the cities and disrupted the economy in that fashion while building up their cadres throughout the country.

In the summer of 1942, guerilla bands under the name of the National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS) began appearing in the mountains.<sup>13</sup> They multiplied quickly and became a potent force as a result of the organizing ability of the cadres developed by EAM. ELAS became the army of EAM-- which meant it was the army of the KKE.

There were other resistance forces in the field at this time - the major ones being the National Republican Greek League (EDES), Panhellenic Liberation Organization (EAO) and the National and Social Liberation (EKKA).<sup>14</sup> These guerrilla organizations were outgrowths of various pre-war political factions. Other than EDES they were not of real significance in fighting the Germans.

The accomplishments of the Greeks in their resistance to the Axis occupying powers is summarized in this quotation from Condit:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>C. M. Woodhouse, Apple of Discord (1948), p 61.

<sup>14</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 123.

<sup>15</sup>D. M. Condit, et al., Challenge and Response in Internal Conflict (1967), Vol, 2, p 164.

At the most, only three German soldiers had been tied down by each guerilla; and during many months, the tiedown ratio had been even lower. Furthermore, German casualties were estimated, on the basis of extremely rough guesses, at only 5,000 to 15,000 men, with probability strongly favoring the smaller figure. On the other hand, one or two German divisions had been kept in Greece in the summer of 1943 when they could have been profitably used in Sicily--an important factor. German communications had been intermittently disrupted, particularly by the attacks on major bridge installations. It might be said that, although the German war effort was not critically affected by the Greek guerrillas, it had been harrassed, its sharpness somewhat blunted, and its psychological self-image deflected.

#### World War II Communist and Non-Communist Conflict

The story of resistance movements in Greece is more one of conflict between guerrillas of different political persuasion than it is of actions against the Germans. British officers in Greece attempted to force a common front among the various resistance groups against the Axis powers, but with little success. It became clear in 1943 that EAM/ELAS intended to be the sole surviving power in Greece when the war ended.<sup>16</sup> They were aided in their efforts by the lack of political unity among Greeks as described in the discussion of pre-war activities. It was less a question of how to fight the Germans and more one of who would govern Greece in the end--communists, royalists, or republicans. With years of underground experience, a popular front appealing to the people, and considerable organizational head start, the communists were winners from the beginning.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp 178-179.

By early 1944, EAO, PAO, and EKKA resistance units had been destroyed or taken over by ELAS. Those guerrillas who were not killed in the ELAS attacks were frequently forced into membership in ELAS through threats or lack of any other way of obtaining food. It is worth restating that EAM/ELAS was following the propaganda line of establishing a free and independent Greece with a democratic government. The communist dogma was concealed for the time, so that ELAS won the support of many who ordinarily would have been strongly anti-communist.

By the time the Germans left Greece in late 1944 the only notable resistance force other than ELAS was EDES. The strength of EDES at this time was perhaps 10,000 and ELAS about 40,000-<sup>17</sup>50,000. EDES forces were concentrated in northwestern Greece around Epirus, while ELAS was in control of almost all the rest of the country. If ELAS had moved to do so in late October, they could have taken control of the entire country and presented the returning Greek government with a 'fait accompli'. They did not do so--apparently because there was hope the government could be controlled through the inclusion of pro-communist ministers in a coalition.

The confusion in Greece from October to December is almost indescribable. British, American, and Russian influences were present and not in accord, the free world press seemed to support the EAM against Greek and British government policies, and the

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p 163.

Greeks, in their usual style, were split in several directions, All guerrillas were to be inactivated and surrender their weapons, but no agreement was reached because of disputes over the status of other units, such as the German sponsored security battalions and the Greek Rimini Brigade (which had returned to Athens from Italy).

On 3 December at a demonstration in Athens, EAM provoked<sup>18</sup> the police into firing into the crowd. Using this as a sign of reactionary repression, ELAS moved to take Athens by force. Within days the violence had spread throughout the country. EAM/ELAS had decided to take over the government by force. By early January British forces had put down the revolution and forced ELAS from Athens. Most significant to the later discussion of the 1946-49 insurgency is that ELAS conducted a campaign of terrorism among the Greeks. In the retreat from Athens they took thousands of hostages and then murdered most of them. More than any other act, this crystallized anti-communist/anti-EAM feeling among the majority of Greeks. From this time on EAM had to rely on terror for support in its campaigns. This round in the communist efforts to rule Greece ended with a truce on 11 January 1945.<sup>19</sup> More significant than the truce, however, was the agreement between EAM and the government signed at Varkiza on 12 February 1945. This document

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<sup>18</sup>Woodhouse, p 211.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp 218-220.



provided for disarming ELAS, an amnesty for ELAS leaders, and a purge of collaborators from the civil service, Gendarmerie, and police. To insure ELAS was disarmed, a list of specific weapons types and quantities to be turned in was prepared. Unfortunately, when ELAS had met (and in some cases exceeded) the requirement there still remained an equally large number cached in the mountains for their next effort. No one realized just how much ELAS had acquired from the retreating Germans.

#### CONDITIONS IN GREECE IN 1946

Following the Varkiza agreement in February 1945 Greece wallowed in dissension, banditry, inflation and near starvation. The brutality of ELAS in the 1944 revolt had reduced its popular support to a minimum. On the other hand, rightist organizations were in the field, presumably fighting communism, and their banditry and brutality almost equalled the communists. The government was not able (and sometimes seemed unwilling) to control them.<sup>20</sup> This, combined with government repression of former ELAS members, drove some Greeks back to the communists. Positions of the far right and far left continued to harden and those who would have preferred more moderate courses were forced to choose one of the two extremes.

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<sup>20</sup> Chamberlin and Iams, p 157.

### The Government and the Economy

One of the agreements between the resistance leaders and the Government in exile was that the King would not return to Greece until the people could express their desires in an election. The British and American governments supported this position. When the Greek government did return in October 1944 it was a coalition 'Government of National Unity', pledged to restore order and conduct elections. The loss of popular support for the Communists caused by their actions in the 1944 revolt led to the election of a rightist government in the first postwar election on 31 March 1946. The plebiscite which followed in September approved the return of King George II although the margin of victory was considerably smaller than in March. The reduced margin was caused by the repressive actions of the elected government against not only the leftists, but those who might have been moderates. Banditry and guerrilla warfare continued to increase while EAM exploited legitimate grievances of the people to turn them against the government.

The economy of Greece could only be called a disaster. Inflation had destroyed the value of any money but gold, the transportation system was in ruins, industry was almost nonexistent, and the country had reached the verge of starvation.<sup>21</sup> The efforts of UNRRA were partially frustrated by incompetence and corruption among government officials and businessmen--

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<sup>21</sup>Stavrianos, pp 157-158

who were also monarchists, and thus gave EAM a target to use in obtaining popular support.

#### Communist Organizations

After the defeat of ELAS in the winter of 1944, followed by the Varkiza agreement, the communists went through a period of self-examination and reorganization. The size of the organization dropped drastically as a result of revulsion against the atrocities of the revolt, but those who remained were the dedicated believers. In current parlance, the party became 'lean and mean'. In the spring of 1945, Zachariades returned to Greece from imprisonment in Germany and resumed control of the KKE. As a legally recognized political party the KKE held its Seventh Congress in Athens in October 1945. The party's immediate objective was stated to be 'the victory of the People's Democracy in Greece' and ultimately 'the construction of a Socialist-Communist society'.<sup>22</sup> In his speech Zachariades made it clear that it was unlikely they would reach their goal by peaceful means. For the time, KKE and EAM dissociated themselves from open support of the ELAS groups still operating in some of the mountain areas. The cache of weapons from the war was still available though, and the Yugoslavs and Bulgarians were training communist cadres north of the Greek border.

However, the KKE did mount a propaganda campaign against

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<sup>22</sup> Kousoulas, p 228.

the British presence in Greece. In the existing state of governmental confusion the British Army kept the KKE from taking over the country. The communists hoped to force their withdrawal before the Greek police and military forces could be rebuilt.<sup>23</sup> Fortunately, the KKE was unsuccessful.

#### Government Forces

At the time of the Varkiza agreement in February 1945 the forces available and loyal to the government consisted of the Rimini Brigade, which was the remnant of the Greek regular Army, and a number of National Guard battalions hastily organized during the December 1944 revolt. The National Guard battalions were formed by enlisting any volunteer who was not a former member of ELAS. There were collaborators with the Germans, criminals, and former members of the security battalions.<sup>24</sup> These battalions were little better than armed rabble.

British Police and Military Missions arrived in Greece in early 1945 under an agreement to organize and train city police, the Gendarmerie, and the Greek Army. Initial plans provided for a Regular Army of 100,000 and Gendarmerie of approximately 21,000 men. The Gendarmerie began to replace some of the National Guard in the summer of 1945, and in May 1946 the National Guard battalions became part of the Regular Army. The schedule for activation and training did not contemplate that the Army

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p 229.

<sup>24</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 160.

would be effective until 1948. As a consequence, when communist attacks began in earnest in 1946 neither the Army nor the Gendarmerie were ready. <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p 161.

## CHAPTER II

### PARAMILITARY FORCES INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT

There were paramilitary forces on both sides of the Greek insurgency. The communist forces were entirely paramilitary--that is, there was no regularly authorized and constituted communist army. Although, in October 1946 the communists proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) and it took on some of the organization of an army, it remained a paramilitary force.<sup>1</sup> The Greek government forces consisted of Regular Army, paramilitary units (National Defense Corps and Gendarmerie), and police. The following paragraphs discuss first the insurgent forces and then the government paramilitary organization.

#### INSURGENT FORCES

The Greek insurgency was communist inspired and led, but the mass of the fighters were not concerned with, or educated in, communist philosophy. As pointed out in Chapter I the average Greek is not good material for communist indoctrination and discipline.

#### Origin and Motivation of Insurgents

At the end of World War II (November 1944 in Greece) the ranks of ELAS included Greeks of every political persuasion--

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<sup>1</sup>Condit, etal., p 504.

convinced communists, non-communists who were also opposed to the return of the monarchy, and many who had found no place else to go during the upheaval of the war. ELAS had absorbed many of the small bands of resistance fighters (frequently bandits) scattered throughout the country during the Italian-German occupation. As mentioned in Chapter I, ELAS had reached a strength of about 40,000 by October 1944. Following the abortive revolt in December 1944 and the Varkiza Agreement in February 1945, the active strength of ELAS declined precipitously. Most returned to civilian life, about eight thousand crossed the borders into Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania, and some hid in the mountains of Greece.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of active hostilities again in 1946 the rebel strength was at 2,500 fighters.<sup>3</sup> These were the hard core volunteers, although many of them may have been 'volunteers' because of a fear of reprisal if they had returned home, rather than as a result of deep devotion to communist philosophy.

Throughout the 1946-49 period of hostilities the rebels were almost entirely Greek. There is no substantial evidence of intervention of Yugoslav, Bulgarian, or Albanian forces other than occasional sightings of small parties in 1946. The war remained Greek against Greek. Rebel strength grew to

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<sup>2</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 225.

<sup>3</sup>J. C. Murray, "The Anti-Bandit War" in US Army Command and General Staff College Reference Book 31-1, p 45.

9,300 by December 1946 and then peaked at 26,000 in March 1948 and remained near this level until the end of the year. As the Greek government pushed the offensive of 1949, guerrilla strength dropped to less than 1,000 by December 1949.<sup>4</sup>

The strength increase in 1946 was gained through volunteers.

Murray's description is clear:

They were ex-partisans, adventurers and criminals, but they included some simple country folk who had fallen victim to Communist propaganda. There were also citizens who had been the victim of unreasoning discrimination since the 1944 revolution.<sup>5</sup>

However, as guerrilla casualties rose toward an average of 1,500 per month, replacements and increases in strength were gained through forced recruiting. Many were taken in raids on villages and then kept in line by threats of reprisal against their families. During 1949, it has been estimated that 11,000 of the 20,000 total guerrillas were forced recruits, with little training, who were held by terror.<sup>6</sup>

#### Organization and Training

For the first year after the Varkiza Agreement (February 1945), and prior to the KKE decision to wage an all-out military campaign, there were perhaps 200 small bands of five to twenty-five members each. They were scattered throughout Greece and operated independently of each other. They were supported by

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<sup>4</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 333.

<sup>5</sup>Murray, p 48.

<sup>6</sup>Condit, et al., p 504.



groups organize by the towns and villages to furnish intelligence and supplies, and assist in the recruiting campaign. The title, "Self Defense Units" (MLA) was adopted by these groups. Their missions specifically were:

- a. Recruiting fighters for the armed guerrilla groups.
- b. Collecting, concentrating and concealing armament.
- c. Organization of an intelligence net.
- d. Securing food, clothing, boots, etc. in order to meet the requirements of guerrilla groups.
- e. Participation in attacks against villages, etc., in cooperation with armed guerrilla groups.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 1946 some of the 8,000 guerrillas who had gone into Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania the previous year began to return. They were graduates of a training center established by the Yugoslavs at Bulkes. Here they had been taught the fundamentals of guerrilla warfare by Tito's experts. The training was thorough and equal to that given the Greek government forces. Russian and Yugoslav field manuals were even translated for use by the Greeks. As these cadres infiltrated back into Greece the organization of the insurgent bands was changed. Beginning in the north and gradually extending southward, guerrilla "groups" of fifty to eighty men were established. Internal organization became more formalized with two or three platoons in each group and two sections in each platoon.

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<sup>7</sup>Alexander Natsinas, Guerrilla Warfare: The Organization and Employment of Irregulars (1950), pp 45-46.

In addition to those who were trained in Yugoslavia, there were a great number in the rebel forces who had fought with ELAS during World War II. As a result, tactical ability of the guerrilla units in 1946 was higher than at any later time. When guerrilla casualties began to increase and forced recruiting became the primary source of replacements, the training time was reduced. New members, particularly in southern Greece, could not easily be sent across the border for training, so local training centers were set up, or recruits received their training in the unit itself. Training periods ranged from two months down to fifteen days. With the time required for political indoctrination, the military training was frequently only a little survival and weapons familiarization.<sup>8</sup> Leaders and specialists did receive more thorough training. By 1948 there were Division and General Headquarters level schools. At Division level two month courses for section leaders, saboteurs and medical personnel were conducted. At GHQ there was a two month school for radio operators and a four month course for political commissars. Platoon leaders were given three months training at GHQ or an officers school in southern Greece.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning in April 1946 groups were assembled into sub-commands. A sub-command consisted of two or three groups. Later, the sub-commands were redesignated as battalions, with three

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<sup>8</sup>Murray, p 77.

<sup>9</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 334.

companies each. The strength of a battalion was to be 200-250.<sup>10</sup>

Between April 1946 and March 1947 seven area headquarters were established on a geographic basis (Thessaly, West Macedonia, Central Macedonia, etc.) to control the activities of the sub-commands in each area. In October 1946 a General Headquarters was organized to supervise the area commands.

The formalizing process continued throughout 1947-48 with the establishment of Brigades to command the battalions and culminated in August 1948 with the activation of eight Division headquarters to control the Brigades. At that time the area commands were abolished.<sup>11</sup>

#### Weapons

Although ELAS complied with the terms of the Varkiza Agreement in surrendering arms in 1945, they retained a tremendous store of weapons in the mountains. This stockpile contained the best of those obtained from the Italians, Germans, and the British during World War II. Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania all provided aid to the Greek rebels in the way of arms and ammunition. No one has ever been able to identify, exactly, how many of each type came from each source, but the following list is a summary of the weapons available to the insurgents between 1946-49.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Natsinas, p 46.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p 47.

<sup>12</sup> L. P. Bloomfield and A. C. Leiss, Controlling Small Wars: A Strategy for 1970's (1969), pp 179-180.

Pistols-- 700  
Rifles - 12,000-15,000  
Individual automatic weapons - 4,600-5,100  
Machine guns - 1,200-1,300  
Mortars - 375-500  
Artillery pieces (75-105mm) - 80  
Anti-aircraft weapons - 44  
Rocket launchers - 140

The number of weapons in the guerrilla inventory is impressive but there were problems with the diversity of makes and models, repair parts, maintenance, and ammunition supply. At least through 1947, however, the individual guerrilla was as well equipped and armed as the Greek gendarme or soldier. The guerrillas never did develop an effective artillery capability, on the other hand; while the government forces did eventually achieve some success with both artillery and air support.

#### Strategy and Tactics

Destruction of the Greek government and replacement by communist party rule through military, economic and psychological operations was the overall strategy of the KKE beginning in 1946. This paper is limited primarily by the military aspects of the revolt, so that only peripheral consideration is given to the economic and psychological strategy. The political goals of the communists cannot be so easily divorced from the military actions. The guerrilla war was directed to the accomplishment of the political objective and the guerrilla tactics required a mixture of military and political techniques. <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Kousoulas, p 243.

Through most of 1946, as the rebel military organization was developing, the combat operations consisted of assassination of local government officials, attacks on small gendarmerie posts, and terrorism. The technique was 'hit and run' and combat with major government forces were avoided. When a guerrilla band was hard-pressed by a government unit they would retreat across the boundary into a safe haven in Yugoslavia or Bulgaria, and then cross the border back to Greece at some other point. Supplies and medical assistance as well as refuge were available to the guerrillas in their safe haven. Attacks on villages and gendarmerie posts were facilitated by the intelligence and covert assistance provided by the village Self-Defense units described earlier. Lines of communication were interdicted by blowing bridges or mining the roadway. This had the two-fold effect of reducing the mobility of pursuing government forces, and further damaging the economy.

For political reasons, communist tactics were later modified to include the conduct of conventional war. The KKE felt it was necessary to establish a "government" which could then ask for foreign intervention to assist in the struggle against the existing regime. To do this the guerrillas had to occupy and retain control of substantial territory which led to head-on confrontation with the Greek Army.

Communist guerrilla tactics were successful because:

1. they made maximum use of surprise.

2. their intelligence net was more effective than the government forces.

3. they were able to concentrate sufficient forces to overwhelm a selected target.

4. they were able to disperse into the mountains before the government forces could react.

On the other hand, the communists failed at conventional war because:

1. they were short of supporting weapons and incompetent in the use of those few they possessed.

2. they did not have the logistics system to support large formations in sustained combat.

3. they lacked adequate training in conventional war at all levels of leadership.

The summary of operations in Chapter III provides examples of the strengths and weaknesses outlined above.

#### GREEK GOVERNMENT FORCES

In the struggle against the communists the Greek government utilized a variety of forces - Army, Navy, Air Force, National Guard, National Defense Corp, Gendarmerie, Civil Police, and armed civilians. This paper is oriented toward the comparison of paramilitary forces and, therefore, discussion will be limited to the National Defense Corps, Gendarmerie, and some of the armed civilians. During 1945-46 there were right wing groups fighting the communists independent of the government.

In many cases they were little better than bandits, and their treatment of those suspected of giving the communists support or sympathy were no less cruel than the guerrillas. As mentioned in Chapter I, these activities actually drove some recruits into the arms of the communists. Fortunately, as legitimate government forces grew stronger the right wing bandits were put out of business.

#### Organization and Training

The oldest paramilitary organization was the Royal Greek Gendarmerie. Founded in 1833 the Gendarmerie functioned under joint Army and Ministry of Interior Control until 1938 when it was transferred to exclusive control of the Ministry of Interior. A British police mission was in Greece at the request of the Greek government from 1919 until 1921. The mission assisted in upgrading the Gendarmerie and brought about a reorganization to improve efficiency. Under the Supreme Commander in Athens, Greece was divided into thirteen High Commands which supervised the field work of the Gendarmerie. As a national police force the Gendarmerie operated throughout the country except in Athens, Piraeus, Patrai, and Corfu where municipal police forces were established. The Gendarmerie, however, retained responsibility for the security of Greek government officials in Athens. The organization chart on the following page shows the major elements of the organization. In the field there was a Gendarmerie post in every village of any size. Their intelligence net was good

Schematic Gendarmerie Organization

Supreme Commander

Chief of Staff

Legal Section

Personnel  
Section

Security  
Section

Technical Services

Research Section

High Persons  
Security Service

High Gendarmerie  
Commands (13)

Commands (62)

Sub-commands (276)

Stations and  
Posts (1520)

Athens  
Garrison

Athens Prison  
Guards

Prison Transit  
Command

Parliament  
Guards



and the Gendarmerie was the organization Metaxas used between 1936 and 1940 to dismantle the KKE.

The Germans had assumed control of the Gendarmerie when Greece was occupied, resulting in charges that the gendarmes were collaborators. While some undoubtedly did collaborate, there was a police mission to perform and the Gendarmerie was the primary police force. Because of the charges of collaboration with the Germans, and because many of its members had been absorbed into the Security Battalions (which the Germans organized to fight resistance) it was necessary to rebuild the Gendarmerie when the Greek government in exile returned to its homeland.<sup>14</sup> At the request of the Greek Government another British Police and Prison Mission came to Greece in 1945, with the two-fold task of performing the Gendarmerie and modernizing the penal system. In February 1945 control of the Gendarmerie was given to the Ministry of Interior. Later that year, in November, control was transferred to the newly created Ministry of Public Order.

Under the guidance of the British mission, officer, non-commissioned officer, and specialist schools were established. Administrative procedures were developed and enlistment standards prescribed.

The authorized strength of the Gendarmerie was 21,000 in 1945, and rose to 32,000 between then and 1947 as the fight

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<sup>14</sup>Condit, et al., p 511.

against the communists intensified. After the National Defense Corps was established the strength of the Gendarmerie was reduced to about 24,000. About 7,000 of the additional strength authorized after 1945 was used to form mobile detachments to assist the Army. They were units of 20 to 30 men, armed with rifles, machine guns, and a small mortar.<sup>15</sup>

The Gendarmerie was to be manned by volunteers with a military draft inducement. On becoming eligible for draft into the Army the young Greek had the option of serving two years in the Army or three years with the Gendarmerie. By the time the British mission left in 1952 the Gendarmerie was developing into a fairly efficient force, although there were still problems with political influence in assignments. Unfortunately, as described in the following chapter, the guerrilla revolt began before the Gendarmerie had been able to complete its organization.

Two of the more formal armed civilian groups were MAD (Units of Pursuit Detachments) and MAY (Units of Rural Security) organized in 1946. They came into being when it was recognized that the Army and Gendarmerie could not protect all villages from attack. MAD was organized by local political leaders for village defense, while MAY units were composed of civilians recruited by the Army to serve in areas near their homes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 162.

<sup>16</sup>Murray, p 54.

Both organizations were provided weapons by the government, but they were unpaid volunteers and the Army had little control over them. Many of these units were guilty of excesses and cruelty in dealing with suspected communists and sympathizers. Members of MAD and MAY received no substantive training to improve their capabilities.

In December 1947 the National Defense Corps was established to replace MAD and MAY by a more effective and responsive organization under positive control. When first conceived in October 1947 the plan was for the National Defense Corps to be a "Home Guard" under Army control, with members to be ex-servicemen from the locality in which the battalion was to operate. Forty battalions of 500 men each were to be organized. With cadres from the Army and the ranks made up of experienced men, the National Defense Corps Battalions could take over the static defense of the villages in their base areas. Almost as soon as the first battalions were activated, the goal was changed to provide for 100 battalions.<sup>17</sup> The concept of the National Defense Corps changed even further in a short time. By June, 1948 some of the battalions were being filled by draftees, given heavier weapons, and redesignated as "Light Infantry Battalions". As time went on these battalions progressed from local defense to active operations as part of the Army.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p 52

<sup>18</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 350.

Expansion of the National Defense Corps mission to operate with the Army meant that some villages would remain unprotected. As a result, political pressure led to the foundation of the Home Guards for Village Defense (MEA). MEA units were to be locally organized, but armed and controlled by the Army. Their mission was to provide local defense as the refugees moved back into their abandoned villages. The total strength of MEA was to be limited to 14,000.<sup>19</sup>

#### Weapons

All of the Government paramilitary forces were lightly armed, initially with British and later some American weapons. The basic rifle for all these forces was the British Enfield. MAD, MAY and the MEA were equipped only with rifles and a few submachine guns, while the National Defense Corps and Gendarmerie were gradually strengthened with automatic weapons, machine guns, and light mortars. However, when hostilities began in 1946 the guerrillas were at least as well armed as the gendarmes, with perhaps an advantage in the numbers of automatic weapons.

The mobile units of the Gendarmerie referred to in the previous section were equipped with Sten guns, a couple of Bren machine guns, and a 2-inch mortar.

Initially National Defense Corps battalions were authorized Enfield rifles, Sten guns, 25 Bren guns, and twelve 2 inch mortars.

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<sup>19</sup>Joint US Military Advisory and Planning Group, Brief History: January 1948 to 31 August 1949 (1949), p 12.

When they were later upgraded to "light infantry" battalions they were given an additional eleven Bren guns, four Vickers machine guns, and four 81mm mortars. <sup>20</sup>

All heavier mortars and artillery were retained in the Greek Army since there were very few of either available, particularly prior to the receipt of American aid in 1948. Whether the performance of the Gendarmerie would have been better in 1946 with improved weapons is a matter of conjecture because of their low level of training and organization.

#### Strategy and Tactics

Government strategy in 1946 could be stated simply as 'survival'. The guerrillas, by the end of 1946, had control of most of the country except Athens. Both strategically and tactically all the Greek national forces were on the defense. Tactically, the paramilitary forces were designed as static defense forces. During 1946 the Gendarmerie posts defended towns and villages, and there was no real effort at pursuit following guerrilla hit and run attacks. The basis for activating a National Defense Corps in 1947 was local defense of government controlled areas to free the Army for the offense. Finally, in 1948 the MEA groups were armed to provide a defense for refugees returning to their liberated villages. However, tactics changed to meet the situation. In the case of the Gendarmerie and the

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<sup>20</sup>Murray, p 73.

National Defense Corps their missions and organization were modified to extend the capability of the Army in striking at the guerrilla bases.

Although the bulk of the Gendarmerie continued to operate in static posts performing police and security duties, the mobile units described earlier were used offensively. As the Army drove the guerrillas from a given area, the mobile Gendarmerie units moved in to mop up any communist stragglers and ensure the area was secure. In this mission the Gendarmerie worked under<sup>21</sup> the control of the Army.

The tactical use of the National Defense Corps battalions changed in 1948 from local defense to limited offensive operations with the Army. By 1949 the battalions were hardly distinguishable from Regular Army infantry battalions and their local defense mission had been assumed by the Gendarmerie and MEA units.

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<sup>21</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 351.

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

The KKE decision to resume the armed struggle against the Greek government was taken at a meeting in February 1946. The actual initiation of the fight is generally considered to be the attack on the village of Litokhoron, near Mount Olympus, on the night of 30 March 1946.<sup>1</sup> The tempo of attacks on isolated villages increased during the summer with the gendarmes taking the brunt of trying to protect the villagers. In August, after the destruction of several villages, the Greek Army began taking over the mission from the Gendarmerie. By the end of 1946 the last of the Gendarmerie posts on the northern border had been eliminated, thus giving the guerrillas free access in and out of Greece.<sup>2</sup>

"...The Greek Government resolved that the Gendarmerie units were totally inadequate to cope with guerrilla warfare."<sup>3</sup>

From lack of experience in dealing with guerrillas and the shortage of forces the Army continued the Gendarmerie strategy of fixed defenses in the villages and towns. The guerrillas then repeated the process of massing superior forces against a village garrison, knowing that neighboring garrisons would not move out aggressively to assist the besieged unit.

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<sup>1</sup>Kousoulas, p 239.

<sup>2</sup>Chamberlain and Iams, p 331

<sup>3</sup>Kousoulas, p 240.

Political pressures were also responsible for this situation. Each member of the legislature wanted a unit to protect his constituents' area with the result that the army found it difficult to concentrate forces for offensive operations. It must also be kept in mind that neither the Gendarmerie or the Army had yet had time for adequate training and were just not prepared for the sort of action they faced.

In August 1946 the KKE sent Markos Vafeiadis to the mountains to coordinate the activities of the guerrilla bands.<sup>4</sup> By October he was able to announce the formation of the "Democratic Army of Greece" (DSE) to fight for the liberation of the Greek people. (The KKE was still a legal political party and claimed no connection with the DSE, although expressing sympathy with its goals.)

Typical of the operations Markos was able to mount were the attacks by 400 guerrillas on Naossa on 1 October, and by 700 guerrillas on Skra on 13 November.<sup>5</sup> In both instances they were aided by the fifth columnists (MLA) in the town. In addition to destroying the Gendarmerie posts, Marko's forces killed known government sympathizers and burned their houses.

With the growth of rebel units to battalion size and larger, they were able to establish control over sizable rural areas. The village 'Self Defense' units kept citizens from passing

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>5</sup>Chambeilin and Iams, p. 229.



information to the army so that guerrilla units could move freely. For an army unit to enter one of these controlled zones required mounting a major operation. The mountainous areas of Grammos and Vitsi in northern Greece along the Yugoslav and Albanian borders were particularly important to the rebels. Control of these areas provided the avenue for supplies and trained replacements to move into Greece from the bases across the border.

#### Greek Government's First Campaign

Government forces mounted their first offensive in April 1947.

The plan was to attack first in central Greece and then sweep gradually northward to the border, destroying the guerrillas along the way. Thereafter the border would be sealed against re-infiltration. Tactically, areas containing guerrilla concentrations were to be isolated and surrounded, whereupon the trapped guerrillas were to be annihilated.<sup>6</sup>

The campaign failed to meet its objective of destroying the guerrillas. In January 1947 the Greek General staff estimated there were almost 11,000 guerrillas operating in Greece, while by November of that year there were over 18,000.<sup>7</sup> The campaign ended in November with the valley areas cleared of the larger guerrilla bands, but with the Army dispersed again in local defense operations. As the offensive had progressed through the summer, infantry battalions had been detached from the attack to

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<sup>6</sup>Murray, p44.

<sup>7</sup>Bloomfield and Leiss, p 178

protect populated areas, so that by November, 47 of the 80 battalions were no longer available for offensive operations. The encirclement tactics were sound, but failure to use them aggressively, combined with lack of training, allowed the guerrillas to slip through the cordons in almost all instances. Those areas which were cleared but not garrisoned by the Army were immediately reoccupied by the guerrillas.

Guerrilla tactics in the Grammos area were different, and reflected the importance of that base area to their continued support from outside Greece. When the Army attacked toward the Grammos region the guerrillas dug in and defended in place, while conducting diversionary counterattacks. The Army withdrew without penetrating the base area.

Illustrating the control of the DSE over its units were the continuing guerrilla attacks on populated areas during the Army offensive. One attack was by a force of 3,000 guerrillas on the village of Metsovon to provide an escape corridor for some 1,500 other guerrillas being pressed by the Army.<sup>8</sup>

#### Change in Communist Strategy

American aid to Greece began in 1947 when the British announced their inability to further sustain the effort. The Truman Doctrine was proclaimed and the machinery to implement it was set in motion in March. The impact of the aid provided will be considered in the following chapter.

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<sup>8</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, pp 238-240

During the summer a degree of political stability was achieved by the Greek government. The more moderate King Paul had succeeded to the throne after the death of George II, and a coalition government had been established with the cooperation of all major political parties except the KKE. Arrest and exile of known communist agitators was stepped up; forcing the party to begin moving underground.

For a variety of reasons relating to the new American policy, Greek government opposition, and external support from the USSR and her satellities, the KKE moved to the point of no return. The communist press announced in October that there was no course left but armed resistance to the monarcho-fascist government. In December a "Provisional Democratic Government of Greece" was formed in the northwestern communist stronghold of Grammos. It was of course, made up of communists, and hoped for overt support from communist bloc countries.<sup>9</sup>

The end result of the KKE action was to move from guerrilla warfare to conventional armed conflict. The Greek government response to the KKE challenge was prompt. The KKE was outlawed, known communists were rounded up, and the battle lines were clearly drawn for the world to see.

To secure a seat for the provisional government, the DSE mounted a strong attack on Konitsa on 31 December. The

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp 270-275

Army reacted swiftly and the DSE attack failed with 650  
communist casualties.<sup>10</sup>

#### An Inconclusive Year - 1948

The Greek Army moved to the offensive again early in 1948. Using the Gendarmerie and National Defense Corps battalions in addition to regular Army units, several operations were conducted. The results were mixed; casualties were inflicted on the guerrillas, but too frequently the mistakes of 1947 were repeated and the guerrillas escaped to fight another day. Politicians were still reluctant to see towns unprotected so that forces could be concentrated for an operation in another area.

Two major operations were mounted during the year by the Army, again with the assistance of the Gendarmerie and the National Defense Corps battalions. One was in the Roumeli area in April and May, and the other around Grammos from June through August. They were best described as conventional, rather than guerrilla, warfare. The Greek Army conducted conventional attacks and the DSE provided a conventional defense, and at the same time conducted battalion and brigade level offensive operations of its own. As a measure of the inconclusiveness of the year's operations, guerrilla strength was estimated at 22,350 in January 1948 and 25,000 in December 1948.<sup>11</sup> The DSF suffered an average of 1,500

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<sup>10</sup>Kousoulas, pp 249-250

<sup>11</sup>Bloomfield and Leiss, p 178

casualties per month. Their losses were made up almost entirely by forced recruiting from the villages near the mountain redoubts under their control. Attacks on populated areas now were conducted primarily to gain recruits and supplies.

By the end of the year the situation had changed little, although the effects of American aid were being felt. The senior Greek commanders were just not effective. They lacked aggressiveness and were prone to question or disregard orders they did not favor.

#### Year of Victory - 1949

A change of military leadership on both sides occurred in January 1949. The Greek Government, after frequent urging by the American Advisor Group, recognized the need for a strong commander of the armed forces. Field Marshal Papagos accepted the assignment after receiving assurances that there would be no political interference with his command. The change was soon reflected in the field as Papagos reprimanded or relieved Corps and Division commanders for incompetence. On the communist side, Markos was relieved as commander of the DSE and removed from the Politburo of the KKE. His sins were two-fold - - he disapproved of the use of conventional war by the DSE and urged a return to sub-conventional, or guerrilla, tactics; and he opposed the idea of Macedonian autonomy which the KKE was forced to endorse to continue receiving support from abroad.

Clearing the Peloponnesos in southwest Greece was the first operation in 1949. Paramilitary forces (primarily the Gendarmerie) were used effectively in two ways. Just prior to the main attack by the Army, the Gendarmerie swept through the villages and arrested every suspected communist and sympathizer. This eliminated the considerable intelligence advantage the guerrillas had previously enjoyed. Then following the attack, the Light Infantry battalions (National Defense Corps) and Gendarmerie mopped up and prevented any guerrillas from re-infiltrating. These operations by the paramilitary forces were considered highly successful.<sup>12</sup> This became the pattern for their operation during the remainder of the war.

While there were frequent guerrilla attacks during the spring and summer of 1949, the initiative had clearly been taken by the Greek government. The appointment of Papagos as commander, improved recruit training, American aid, and the morale building impetus of a few victories made the difference. Major offensives were mounted through the summer and the DSE was worn down through attrition. As more of their bases were seized they ran short of food and ammunition.

By August, about 12,000 of the remaining guerrillas were concentrated in the Vitsi-Grammos areas and the Greek Army prepared to launch its final drive. A successful combined arms

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<sup>12</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 432.

operation resulted in the destruction of the guerrilla bases and the DSE as an effective force. Although several thousand guerrillas escaped into Albania, the war ended in October 1949 with an announcement by the KKE that they were stopping the conflict to reduce the suffering of the Greek people. A glance at the statistics gives some further insight into the KKE decision. Guerrilla strength in January 1949 was estimated as 23,000, and in October as 1,760.<sup>13</sup> The Greek government had survived.

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<sup>13</sup>Bloomfield and Leiss, p 178.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF PARAMILITARY FORCE EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of both communist and government paramilitary forces resulted from a combination of factors --some traditionally military, but also political, social and economic.

The rebel goal in Greece was to replace the existing representative government with a communist government. Their initial strategy was to use legitimate popular dissatisfaction with economic and social conditions in Greece as a lever to gain communist membership in (and, eventually, control of) the government. When it became apparent that the "popular front" approach would not succeed, a new strategy of direct confrontation between the existing government and the provisional communist controlled government was adopted. The Greek government goal was survival, and its strategy was to put down the armed revolt (which was helping to create the economic and social conditions the communists were using), and rebuild the economy of Greece.

We know that both communist strategies failed and the government succeeded. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the reasons why, as they pertain to paramilitary forces.

#### MILITARY ASPECTS

The military aspects of paramilitary forces operations will be examined under five headings. The particular headings are not significant, but provide convenient starting points for analysis.



### Tactics

What guerrilla tactics were effective and which were not, and how did the government respond? Several books and many articles have been written on this subject, which is summarized here in a page or two.

Guerrilla operations through 1946-1947 were nearly all successful. Their aim was to convince the people that the government could not protect them and that the KKE offered the only reasonable solution. The three principles of guerrilla operation outlined by Zacharakis were: <sup>1</sup>

1. Local superiority, gained through surprise and concentration of forces.
2. Completion of the mission before the enemy can react.
3. Avoiding battle against superior forces.

These principles were followed in the series of attacks on towns and villages which drove the Gendarmerie out of the northern border area and permitted the guerrillas unrestricted movement across the border. One key factor was their intelligence system operated by the MIA. These supporters living in the towns were able to give guerrilla bands the exact strength, disposition, and argument of the defense. They even recommended routes of approach and frequently furnished guides. Combined with the attacks on populated areas were ambushes of government forces and mining of roads, with the end result that government influence

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<sup>1</sup>LTC E.E. Zacharakis, "Lesson Learned from the Anti-guerrilla War in Greece 1946-1949," General Military Review, (July 1960), p 183.

nearly disappeared in the rural areas. In little more than three years the guerrillas attacked more than 2,000 towns and villages, destroyed over 900 road and railroad bridges, completely destroyed almost 25,000 houses, executed 4,100 civilians and killed another 900 with mines.<sup>2</sup> During most of this period the guerrillas numbered less than 20,000 and were opposed by government forces of over 150,000.

Following establishment of the rebel provisional government in December 1947 the nature of the war began to change. The DSE battalions were aggregated into brigades and divisions and fought head-on battles with the Army in addition to continuing guerrilla attacks. The DSE was uniformly unsuccessful in conventional combat without having air, artillery and organized logistics support.

Government tactics in 1946 were a complete failure. Small isolated detachments were decimated by the guerrilla attacks. There were no coordinated defense effort at any level. Frequently, Gendarmerie and Army units in the same town made no effort to coordinate their defensive arrangement. The Army was further hindered by the political pressures mentioned earlier.

In a politico-military situation of this type it was practically impossible for field commanders to adhere to the basic principles of war. The principles specifically violated were those of unity of command, mass, economy of force, maneuver, and, above all, the offensive. It was under those

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<sup>2</sup>Natsinas, pp 52-53.

conditions which destroyed the GNA's (Greek National Army) initiative that the guerrilla forces, capably and fanatically led, were able to carry out their program of systematic devastation.<sup>3</sup>

Through the efforts of the British and American training advisors the situation was much improved by mid-1948. The Army, Gendarmerie, and National Defense Corps, working in concert, began having some success. Following the outlawing of the KKE in December 1947, known communists and sympathizers were being detained in special camps. A specific tactic which was developed required the Gendarmerie to sweep through the villages in the vicinity of a planned operations and round up all suspected sympathizers. The effect was to cut off the guerrilla intelligence flow and put the element of surprise on the government side. The National forces could then attack using tactics appropriate to the situation. One move often used was the surprise encirclement, if the area could be surrounded by sufficient troops. The circle was then squeezed until the guerrillas surrendered or were destroyed. The second was entrapment, in which a government force would push into a guerrilla stronghold forcing the rebels to move along routes where they were ambushed by other units. The third tactic, used especially by the Army commandos, was the raid into enemy base areas. This type of operation destroyed headquarters units and was demoralizing to the rebels as well.

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<sup>3</sup>LTC Edward R. Wainhouse, "Guerrilla War in Greece, 1946-49; A Case Study", in Modern Guerrilla Warfare, ed. by Franklin M. Osanka, p 222.

It was a case of turning the guerrilla's tactics against them.<sup>4</sup> In all area clearing operations, mopping up and pursuit by the Gendarmerie or National Defense Corps battalions was pushed aggressively.

#### Strength and Equipment

Guerrilla strength rose from 2,600 in June 1946 to a peak of 26,000 in March 1948 and then waned to less than 1,000 in December 1949. Of more importance, it remained near or above 20,000 from late 1947 through the spring of 1949; almost 18 months.<sup>5</sup> The reliability of this force varied considerably. In the early days it was composed of hard core communists, bandits, and sympathizers. Before the communist-guerrilla link was made known to the world in October 1947, many well meaning Greeks had volunteered. However, beginning in 1947 losses began to outnumber volunteers and the forcible recruiting from the villages began.<sup>6</sup> Desertions from the rebel ranks became common and many units were unreliable. Another indication of the recruiting problem is revealed by the fact that 20 percent of the guerrillas were women.<sup>7</sup>

Government paramilitary strengths cannot be compared directly with the number of insurgents, since the Army carried

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<sup>4</sup>Zacharakis, pp 187-189.

<sup>5</sup>Bloomfield and Leiss, p 178.

<sup>6</sup>Theodossios Papathanasiades, "The Bandit's Last Stand in Greece", Military Review, (February 1951), p 21.

<sup>7</sup>Wainhouse, p 221.

the bulk of the fighting. Total government forces fluctuated between 230,000 and 250,000.<sup>2</sup> Of this, the Gendarmerie had about 30,000 and the National Defense Corps 50,000.

Armament of the opposing forces was considered in Chapter II. Suffice it to say, that in sub-conventional or guerrilla fighting, the weapons of the rebels versus the Gendarmerie and National Defense Corps were about a standoff. With regard to equipment such as radios and vehicles, the advantage was with the government through the American aid program.

#### External Support

Both sides received substantial external support during the conflict. The Greek government was assisted by the British alone until 1947, when the American aid program was begun. The guerrillas relied on the governments of Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Albania for outside assistance.

External support was vital for both parties in the conflict. Greece had suffered great damage during World War II; agriculture and the economy were in ruins, and there was no arms industry. All of the wherewithal, except manpower, for maintenance of an armed force had to come from abroad. Other things being equal, the quality and quantity of external support could have been the deciding factor.

Figures are not available to detail the amount of aid the communists received from outside Greece, but the following list

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<sup>2</sup>Condit, etal, p 512

illustrates the type and general magnitude:<sup>9</sup>

1. Yugoslavia allowed the guerrilla radio station to operate within its borders.

2. Yugoslavia seemed to be the leader in the communist world propaganda campaign against the Greek government.

3. "Committees for Aid to Democratic Greece" were established in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, France, and Italy. These committees provided funds and propaganda support.

4. Supplies were transhipped from Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria through Yugoslavia to Greece

5. Yugoslavia provided recruiting centers, supply dumps, refugee camps, and hospitals. Over 6,000 wounded apparently were treated in Yugoslavia between mid-1947 and the end of hostilities. The Yugoslav contribution to training was described earlier.

6. Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania all provided sanctuaries for the rebels when they were being pursued by the Greek forces. This advantage is almost an exact parallel with the sanctuaries enjoyed in Laos and Cambodia by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army until the spring of 1970. However, no action was ever taken against the Balkan sanctuaries until the Yugoslavs themselves closed the border in July 1949.

The number of weapons available to the guerrillas were detailed

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<sup>9</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, pp 276-278.

in Chapter II. Many of these came from the communist bloc, as did most of the ammunition.

The total dollar value of material aid provided the Greek Government from all sources is not recorded, but American aid (under the Truman Doctrine) during fiscal years 1948 through 1950 amounted to 1.24 billion dollars. Of this, 477 million was military aid, and 761 million economic aid.<sup>10</sup> Earlier, between October 1944 and June 1947, the British and UNRRA had spent 415 million dollars for relief and rehabilitation.<sup>11</sup> Equally significant to government success were the British and American Missions in Greece. They provided training and advisory functions with the military services and the government ministries. Not only was it necessary to rebuild the armed forces from the ground up, but the government had to be modernized to cope with the social and economic problems resulting from the war.

The American Mission, in particular, devoted the bulk of its effort to stabilizing the economy and encouraging the Greeks to balance their budget and begin some form of economic planning.<sup>12</sup> In the long run these actions contributed as much to the defeat of the communists as did the military aid.

#### The Scale of Conflict

The revolt in Greece was a minor item on the world scene. Europe was prostrate and only beginning to look to its future,

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<sup>10</sup>William Hardy McNeill, Greece: American Aid in Action 1946-1956, (1957), p 229.

<sup>11</sup>Chamberlin and Iams, p 243.

<sup>12</sup>McNeill, p 48.

let alone the future of a minor Balkan state, while the United States was demobilizing globally and converting from a wartime to peacetime economy. Only England and the Soviet Union recognized the stakes in Greece.

Within Greece, on the other hand, the revolt was essentially total war. With a total population of 7,500,000 in 1948, over 2,400,000 were on relief of some form.<sup>13</sup> There were over 700,000 refugees forced from their land; unwilling or unable to return until the conflict was settled. Only in the major cities was life able to continue without constant fear of guerrilla attack or government counterattack, and even there the continuing inflation and crowds of refugees kept everything in turmoil.

Militarily the scale of conflict escalated from scattered guerrilla raids in 1946 to open conventional warfare by 1948. The change from sub-conventional to conventional warfare was previously established as the date in October 1946 when the KKE announced the formation of the provisional government.

#### Relationship Among Government Forces

Little detailed information is available on the working relationships of the various government organizations. There apparently had been a history of jealousy and friction between the Gendarmerie and city police, resulting from the

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<sup>13</sup>Stavrianos, p 193



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Even before World War II the government in Athens was a world apart from life in the rural areas. The rich minority in the cities grew richer while the standard of living outside the cities remained at subsistence levels. As a result, the slogans of EAM calling for a free democratic government found support-- particularly when the government undertook unreasonable repressive measures against EAM/KKE sympathizers. It was only after the organization in 1947 of a coalition government under a widely respected leader that the people began to draw together in effective opposition to the guerrillas.<sup>15</sup> Guerrilla atrocities against unarmed civilians combined with kidnappings and forced recruiting also played a large part in the government victory.

The status of Macedonia was an issue which worked against the communists and eventually led to the cessation of support from Yugoslavia and closure of the border to the guerrillas. In 1948 Yugoslavia had been ejected from the Cominform for "deviationism" because Tito was following his own course. One of his objectives apparently was to gain control of a portion of Greek and Bulgarian Macedonia in conjunction with Bulgaria annexing Greek Thrace. When Stalin denounced the plan a rift developed within the KKE between pro-Yugoslav communists and the Stalinists. The commander of the DSE, Markos Vafiades, who was a Titoist, was ousted by the old Stalinist and head of the

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<sup>15</sup>Condit, et al., p 516.

KKE, Zachariades. However, in an effort to gain Bulgarian support for the insurgency, Zachariades reversed his position and the KKE came out in favor of an independent Macedonia. This step, more than any other single action, convinced the average Greek citizen that the communists were guilty of treason and unworthy of support. <sup>16</sup>

#### Economic and Social Issues

Economic and social conditions in Greece have been described at several points in this paper. The situation at the beginning of the conflict is well summarized in this quotation from Condit: <sup>17</sup>

Between 1941 and 1945 approximately half a million persons, out of a population of only seven and a half million, had died as a direct or indirect result of the war. Another million and a half had been driven from their homes. Malaria and Tuberculosis were widespread, for the public health system had collapsed. Nor was there much hope for rapid recovery. Inflation had wiped out the country's capital resources. Unemployment and underemployment were compounded by wartime agricultural ravages which had lowered production to a third of the prewar total and by the virtual destruction of Greek industry. Public administration had suffered unprecedented dislocation. According to Greek government estimates, the country had suffered damages amounting to four billion dollars which affected the nation's communications system as well as the homes and property of its citizens.

Certainly these conditions provided the opportunity for the communists to point out the deficiencies of the present government as it struggled with the problems. It was easy for the KKE to make its "pie in the sky" promises since they were

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<sup>16</sup>Kousoulas, pp 262-263

<sup>17</sup>Condit, et al., p 499.

never called upon to deliver. The volunteer support given the rebels in 1946 was largely due to the hope that a change in government would bring improvements in living conditions.

The military victory finally gained in 1949 would never have been possible without the massive economic support provided by Britain and the United States.

Conversely, the loss of support for the guerrillas which resulted from closure of the Yugoslav border in 1949 was the final blow which made the military defeat inevitable. Without the supplies, medical care, and sanctuary available in Yugoslavia, the guerrillas could not hope to sustain themselves.

#### External Relations

The EAM had managed to develop an image for itself and ELAS during World War II as a group of true Greek patriots fighting for their country. This image was carried over into their objections to the return of the monarchy after the war, with the result that world opinion generally favored the EAM goal of a change in government. Fortunately the British Mission in Greece recognized EAM as a KKE front and was able to frustrate its efforts initially. Both the British and American press were outspoken in condemnation of the Greek government. Only after the United Nations had investigated and confirmed Greek complaints of external assistance from Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania, did Americans begin to perceive the struggle as something more than a patriotic desire for a republican form of government. Soviet bloc governments, of course, were vociferous in their

support of the KKE and must have been overjoyed to find the west on the same side of the argument. There was even a feeling on the part of the American government that the British were intervening in Greek internal affairs.

American support for the Greek government was crystallized only after the Truman doctrine was enunciated and details of the communist activities began to sink home. The aid program which flowed from the Truman doctrine brought the Greek, British, and American governments into close cooperation.

The United Nations again proved invaluable after the communists established their provisional government. Five days after the announcement by the KKE, the United Nations special commission on the Balkans adopted a resolution warning against recognition of the provisional government by other nations. Recognition followed by aid or assistance would constitute a threat to the "maintenance of international peace and security".<sup>18</sup> This timely move deterred recognition of the provisional government and made its establishment an empty gesture.

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<sup>18</sup>Murray, p 43.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Comments on Sources

A great deal has been written about Greece and the communist attempts to gain control of the government prior to, during, and after World War II. The political, social and economic issues are analyzed in several excellent volumes. The military aspects of the conflict following World War II have also been the subject of many articles by Greek officers and their British and American advisors. Unfortunately, the emphasis in military writings has been on the Greek Army itself. Very little apparently has been written dealing with the organization, equipment and operations of the Gendarmerie and other paramilitary organizations. Further research might locate additional sources in Great Britain, since the British were the advisors to Greece in organizing and training the Gendarmerie and City Police forces. However, in the limited time to date these sources have not been located.

#### Statement of Conclusions

Several conclusions rapidly become obvious in studying various discussions of the 1946-1949 conflict.

First was the communist loss of popular support. There was a period in 1946 when the ELAS atrocities of December 1944 were almost forgotten in the face of the rightist elements' atrocities and abuse of former ELAS members. Combined with the suffering and economic deprivation of the time, the communists might have

been able to develop an overwhelming political strength if they had taken advantage of the situation.

Instead, the KKE and its guerrilla forces resorted to indiscriminate rapine, extortions, assassinations, reprisals, abductions arson, and terrorism which contributed a great deal toward sealing the military doom of the Communist guerrilla campaign in Greece.

Support for Macedonian independence by the KKE also seriously harmed the KKE position in Greek eyes. No Greek was willing to see his country partitioned. The combination of these two factors kept the KKE from developing the popular support needed to win.

Second, neither the government nor the rebels would have been effective without external support. One might even argue that it was the weight of American and British aid over communist bloc aid which carried the day for the Greek government. Famine would surely have resulted were it not for the UNRRA and US food supply programs, and the internal transportation network could not have been restored without the US economic aid program. These two programs enabled the government of Greece to extend its control over the populace as the guerrillas were eliminated.

A third conclusion is that effective military and civil leadership is required to defeat an insurgency. A Greek coalition government was formed in 1947 which was able to merge the monarchist and republican positions into an effective body which provided stability during the remaining years of war. However, military success against the guerrillas was not achieved until

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<sup>1</sup>Wainhouse, p 222

a dynamic military leader (Papagos) was appointed in 1949. The combination of his leadership with the cooperation of the civilian hierarchy won the final victory.

Finally, we can conclude that the KKE establishment of a provisional government and the step up from guerrilla to conventional war was a move of desperation. Without direct outside intervention there was no chance of the rebels defeating the Greek Army in a direct confrontation. Whether Markos was right in wanting to keep the conflict at the sub-conventional level will never be known, but it almost certainly could have prolonged the war.

The four conclusions above deal with the broad picture of the insurgency against the Greek government. The purpose of this paper was to delve into the roles and accomplishments of the paramilitary forces. Specifically, what role did they play and what was their value in restoring order? Conclusions concerning these questions are more difficult to draw with certainty for two reasons. First, there is a lack of detailed information on the training and operations of the National Defense Corps, Gendarmerie, and armed civilians. Further, the major burden of defeating the guerrillas was carried by the Army, which obscures the contribution of other forces. With these caveats in mind, there are some conclusions which can be drawn about the paramilitary forces.

The Gendarmerie was not ready in 1946 to cope with an insurgency and therefore the Army was called in much earlier than would normally be necessary. A well trained, properly armed



Gendarmerie of 21,000 men, backed by a stable government, should have been able to put down the 2,500 rebels operating in the spring of 1946. However, tainted with the charge of collaboration with the Germans, disorganized and poorly armed, the Gendarmerie could not cope with even a limited number of insurgents.

We may further conclude that the government condoned rightist hands (including MAD and MAY) operating against the communists in 1946-1947 were more harm than help to the government. They were fighting communists, but their methods of determining guilt by association and the cruelties inflicted on innocent families drove many moderates into sympathy with the KKE.

A conclusion on the positive side is that the Gendarmerie National Defense Corps, and armed civilians (MEA) did later perform valuable service by mopping up areas cleared by the Army, and then provided local defense to prevent further infiltration by the Guerrillas. The Army was then left free to concentrate its forces on the destruction of guerrilla concentrations.

Finally, a well trained national police force, such as the Gendarmerie, appears to be the most appropriate organization to counter such threats as the communists posed in Greece. There are two requirements. First a stable government, mindful of its social and economic responsibilities to all the people. Second, a well trained and respected Gendarmerie working in

daily close contact with the people; able to stem an insurgency  
at the level of individual actions before a higher level of  
conflict is reached.

  
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